

CREDITING COMMERCIAL MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE PRODUCTS

When school nutrition programs use commercially prepared foods such as pizza, chicken nuggets, cheese ravioli and breakfast sandwiches to meet the meal pattern requirements for the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) and School Breakfast Program (SBP), each product must provide a sufficient amount of meat/meat alternate. Menu planners must ensure that any commercial products provide the **actual amount** of the meal pattern component being credited. For example, to credit a commercially prepared burrito as 2 ounce equivalents of meat/meat alternates, the manufacturer's product documentation must indicate the specific amount of meat, beans and cheese in one serving.

Menu planners cannot determine the amount of meat/meat alternates in a food by reading the product's nutrition facts label or ingredients.

Protein content is not an indicator that a product credits toward the meat/meat alternates component because the grams of protein listed on a product's food label do not correspond to the ounces of meat/meat alternate contained in the product. Protein is only one component of meat/meat alternates, which also contain other components such as water, fat, vitamins and minerals. Protein is also found in varying amounts in other ingredients that may be part of a meat/meat alternate product, such as cereals, grains and many vegetables.



While the terms protein and meat/meat alternate are often used interchangeably, they are not the same. The USDA meal pattern requirements are for a specific amount of **meat/meat alternate**, not for a specific amount of protein. The only exception is commercial tofu and tofu products that meet specific criteria. For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) handout, [*Crediting Tofu and Tofu Products*](#).

For all commercial meat or meat alternate products that are processed or contain added ingredients, school nutrition programs must obtain documentation from the manufacturer stating the amount of meat/meat alternate per serving. This documentation must be either:

- an original Child Nutrition (CN) label from the product carton; or
- a product formulation statement (PFS) signed by an official of the manufacturer stating the total weight of meat/meat alternates contained in one serving of the product.

Without this documentation, schools cannot use the product to credit toward the meat/meat alternates component. For more information, see the CSDE's handouts, [*Child Nutrition \(CN\) Labeling*](#), [*Product Formulation Statements*](#) and [*Accepting Processed Product Documentation*](#).

The school food authority (SFA) is responsible for obtaining documentation that commercially prepared products contain a sufficient amount of meat/meat alternates to meet the meal pattern requirements. This documentation must be either an original CN label from the product carton or a product formulation statement signed by an official of the manufacturer stating the amount of each meal pattern component contained in one serving of the product.

CREDITING COMMERCIAL MEAT/MEAT ALTERNATE PRODUCTS, continued

MAIN DISH REQUIREMENT

Foods that are not a **main dish** or are not easily **recognizable** as meat/meat alternates cannot credit toward the meat/meat alternates component even if they contain a meat/meat alternate. Examples include soup made with blended soft tofu, pasta made with legumes and muffins made with peanut butter or yogurt. The intent of this requirement is to ensure that schools are offering meat/meat alternates in a form that is recognizable to students. The USDA emphasizes the importance of the nutrition education aspect of school nutrition programs, which includes the goal of helping children easily recognize the key food groups that contribute to a healthy meal.

RESOURCES

Accepting Processed Product Documentation:

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/acceptdoc.pdf

Crediting Foods (CSDE Web Page):

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=333796

Food Buying Guide for School Meal Programs:

www.fns.usda.gov/tn/food-buying-guide-school-meal-programs

Guidance for Accepting Processed Product Documentation for Meal Pattern Requirements
(CSDE Operational Memorandum 10-15):

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/opmemos/15/om_10-15.pdf

Menu Planning Guide for School Meals:

www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2626&q=334320

Reviewer's Checklist for Evaluating Manufacturer Product Formulation Statements for Meat/Meat Alternates:

www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/reviewer_checklist.pdf

USDA Sample Product Formulation Statement for Meat/Meat Alternates:

www.fns.usda.gov/sites/default/files/pfsmma.pdf



For more information, see the Connecticut State Department of Education's (CSDE) [Menu Planning Guide for School Meals](#) and [Meal Patterns](#) and [Crediting Foods](#) Web pages or contact the [school nutrition programs](#) staff in the CSDE Bureau of Health/Nutrition, Family Services and Adult Education, 25 Industrial Park Road, Middletown, CT 06457.

This bandout is available at www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/deps/nutrition/nslp/crediting/appreq.pdf.

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